The Washington merry-go-round

F'Post 9-17-75

With LES WHITTEN

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WASHINGTON—Smoking used to leave Russia's Leonid Brezhnev with such a sore mouth that he had to have his gums massaged every day by his doctor. The pain has now compelled the Soviet leader to give up cigarettes.

Brezhnev's dental secrets, it seems, are fully known to the Central Intelligence Agency. All the fascinating details (smoking apparently caused the blood vessels in his gums to constrict, thus producing the pain) are on file in the CIA's "LSD Office."

This office has nothing to do, we hasten to add, with the controversial drug that the CIA has fed to unsuspecting victims. In this case, the initials stand for "Life Sciences Division." Its specialists collect and analyze intelligence on the health of world leaders.

For all their intimate knowledge about the state of Brezhnev's gums, however, they have not been able to pin down the truth about his health. His file is fat with rumors about his ailments, but the facts have been elusive.

The Kremlin kingpin shows symptoms, apparently, of having been treated with cortisone. This is a hormone used to combat any number of ailments, including leukemia, arthritis, rheumatic fever, gout and itching.

He could be afflicted, therefore, with anything from terminal cancer to the seven-year-itch. In the flesh, he appears quite fit. But some intelligence analysts, going out on a limb, have predicted his health soon will force him to retire.

Only three solid facts have been established: (1) he suffers from hangovers; (2) he has a queasy stomach; and (3) he is plagued with horrendous dental problems.

Brezhnev's fondness for vodka has been known to the CIA for years. Indeed, the CIA has established indisputably that he sometimes shows up in the Kremlin the worse for the past night's partying.

To relieve his woes on these occasions, he likes to stop off at a health spa near a corner of the Kremlin, a spot the Soviet hierachy calls the "clinic. There, he may take a steam bath or get a rubdown from a favorite masseuse.

The CIA triumphantly established that Brezhnev had a queasy stomach during his 1973 flight to the United States. Sources aboard the Brezhnev plane reported that the Soviet leader made a desperate dash for the washroom with every downdraft.

When he landed at Dulles Airport outside Washington, he made straight for the presidential retreat at Camp David where he remained ensconced for 18 hours before beginning official ceremonies.

Although the CIA has reliable information about Brezhnev's bad gums, the experts have been unable to fix the cause. "If he had had good American dental care all his life," suggested one intelligence analyst, "he probably wouldn't have this trouble."

Our own dental experts tell us that Brezhnev's aching mouth could mean he has any of a host of ailments, from simple callousing of the gums to leukoplakia, a condition characterized by lesions which could become cancerous.

Or maybe, suggested one authority, the sore mouth is nothing serious at all, and Brezhnev's doctors merely used it to "scare him into quitting smoking."

SECRET ACCORDS: In negotiating the historic Israeli-Egyptian agreement, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger made secret pledges not only to Israel but to Egypt.

We published the secret accords with Israel in an earlier column. Now here are the secret assurances Kissinger gave to the Egyptians:

"The United States intends to make a serious effort," it was stipulated, to help bring about further negotiations between Syria and Israel, in the first instance through diplomatic channels.

"In the event of an Israeli violation of the agreement, the United States is prepared to consult with Egypt as to the significance of the violation and possible remedial action by the United States.

"The United States will provide technical assistance to Egypt for the Egyptian Early Warning Station."

TEAMSTERS INVESTIGATION: The Federal government is less interested in what happened to James Hoffa than in what has happened to the Teamsters' pension and welfare funds. It is believed that mobsters eliminated Hoffa to protect their interest in Teamster loans.

The Teamsters have an estimated $1.5 billion in assets, which are supposed to provide retirement benefits for 400,000 union members. But there have been reports that mobsters have obtained a hold on the purse strings. Both the Justice and Labor departments would like to untangle the strings. But it would take more auditors than are now available.

NUCLEAR ACCIDENT?: Rep. James Scheuer, D-N.Y., is worried over the shipment of lethal enriched uranium through heavily populated New York City to the John F. Kennedy airport. An accident, of course, would be disastrous.

On at least one occasion, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission neglected to tell the Joint Congressional Atomic Energy Committee, as it was supposed to do, about a 100-around cargo until it had been shipped. Scheuer, therefore, will attempt to tighten the laws that govern the handling of nuclear materials.